

Freedom and Fundamental Option

Wolność i opcja podstawowa

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Abstract: The theory of “fundamental option” or “fundamental freedom” constitutes an important theme in contemporary moral theology, a theme criticized in John Paul II’s encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. Under this theory, it is almost impossible for a person to commit a mortal sin, that is, a sin that turns the agent against God and deprives him of sanctifying grace. This central conception governing this theory is that such a sin must involve an express turning of one’s entire self (or will) away from God. However, within the limitations of space and time and the finitude of human nature, such a complete turning against God is difficult to conceive. This paper argues that the issue of sin is misconceived and that the philosophical premise of a fundamental disposition of one’s freedom is not tenable. Sin is a theological category and must be grasped in theological terms. The paper turns to Pope Saint John Paul II’s Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*, which proposes that sin is revealed by and properly understood in terms of the crucifixion of Christ. The paper concludes with some reflections on those who were directly involved in the crucifixion.

Keywords: fundamental freedom; mortal sin; Pope John Paul II; Holy Spirit; self-determination

Abstrakt: Teoria „fundamentalnej opcji” lub „fundamentalnej wolności” stanowi ważny temat we współczesnej teologii moralnej, temat skrytykowany w encyklice Jana Pawła II *Veritatis splendor*. Zgodnie z tą teorią prawie niemożliwe jest popełnienie grzechu śmiertelnego, to znaczy grzechu, który zwraca człowieka przeciwko Bogu i pozbawia go łaski uświęcającej. Główną koncepcją rządzącą tą teorią jest to, że taki grzech musi wiązać się z wyraźnym odwróceniem całego siebie (lub woli) od Boga. Jednak w ramach ograniczeń przestrzeni i czasu oraz skończoności ludzkiej natury, takie całkowite zwrócenie się prze-

ciwko Bogu jest trudne do wyobrażenia. Niniejszy artykuł dowodzi, że kwestia grzechu jest błędnie pojmowana, że filozoficzne założenie fundamentalnego usposobienia własnej wolności jest nie do utrzymania. Grzech jest kategorią teologiczną i musi być pojmowany w kategoriach teologicznych. W artykule ukazano grzech jako objawiony i właściwie rozumiany w kategoriach ukrzyżowania Chrystusa, na co zwraca uwagę Jan Paweł II w encyklice *Dominum et Vivificantem*. Artykuł kończy się kilkoma refleksjami na temat tych, którzy byli bezpośrednio zaangażowani w ukrzyżowanie.

Słowa kluczowe: opcja fundamentalna; grzech śmiertelny; papież Jan Paweł II; Duch Święty; samostanowienie

Introduction

In a recent address, Pope Francis challenged moral theologians to return to the roots of theology while avoiding “backwardness”.

“It is true that we theologians, even Christians, should turn to the roots; this is true. Without the roots we cannot take a step forward. From the roots we draw inspiration, but in order to go forward. This is different than turning backward. Turning backward is not Christian” (Francis 2022).

The subject of this paper is sin, sin so serious that it ruptures the sinner’s relationship with God. To understand this sin and its relationship with the person’s fundamental option, we follow Pope Saint John Paul II’s lead and turn to the Scriptural roots of our knowledge of sin. Citing God’s prohibition against eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:16-17), Pope Saint John Paul II writes, “With this imagery, Revelation teaches that *the power to decide what is good and what is evil does not belong to man but to God alone.*” The first sin, which is the primordial sin, was to disobey the Lord God’s command, which Scripture represents as the command not to eat of the one tree. The woman, however, succumbed to the Tempter’s suggestion that to eat of the tree would lead her to wisdom and to equality with God. “You will be like God”. And she gave the fruit to her husband and he, too, ate of it. They judged the serpent’s word to be more reliable than God’s, because, of course, the fruit looked good to eat and the wisdom promised was desirable. And this was the pattern for subsequent sins of mankind. Immediately upon eating of the fruit, their eyes were opened. They were ashamed of their nakedness, and concupiscence – the constant impulse to sin – came to rule their lives.

For his part, Satan sinned at his creation. Taken with his own beauty and intelligence, the brightest angel turned to himself and away from God for his perfect good. Because he is pure spirit, his was an irrevocable choice, an eternal sin that cannot be undone. Human beings, by contrast, live a bodily existence in time. We are readily distracted and preoccupied. Our projects go

astray. Even the most fervent soul prays and loves God with a material body, with its unruly brain and nervous system. Our virtuous as well as our vicious acts unfold in time. We are not angels.

The fundamental option

One of the most difficult issues, philosophically speaking, in contemporary moral theology is that of the *fundamental option* and its impact on the doctrine of sin. Concerning this fundamental option, Joseph Fuchs writes, “Whereas freedom of choice is encountered within our reflective conscious experience, this is not true of the fundamental freedom. [...] So, awareness of *fundamental* freedom is not directly accessible to observation and verification. Necessarily athematic (that is, not conceptual and not reflectively conscious), it is also termed transcendental” (Fuchs 1990).

Therefore, only an act or decision touching one’s fundamental freedom can truly constitute a mortal sin, a decisive turning away from God. Satan’s sin at his creation was such an act. Acts within a human person’s ordinary “reflective conscious experience” involve direct experience of the world, but, according to Fuchs, the elements of immediate consciousness do not touch the transcendental level of one’s fundamental disposition toward goodness or evil. Therefore, no act limited by space and time within the finite capacities of one’s existential situation can be so gravely wrong that it breaks one’s relationship with the perfect good. A discouraged salesman might fall into adultery on his business trip, or a modern-day Job might even curse God, without his act touching the disposition of his fundamental freedom. Richard McCormick sharpens this perspective further by maintaining that the fundamental freedom is more than simply the matter of a particular choice: Richard McCormick writes, “The turning away from God that results in the loss of charity must be a *self*-disposition, not merely freedom of choice” (McCormick 1989, 189).

Pope Saint John Paul II addresses the theory of fundamental option in *Veritatis Splendor*, writing “A *distinction* thus comes to be introduced *between the fundamental option and deliberate choices of a concrete kind of behaviour*.” “Good” and “evil” are restricted to the moral, transcendental dimension, “right” and “wrong” to “innerworldly” behavior; hence “specific kinds of behaviour, which are judged to be morally right or wrong only on the basis of a technical calculation of the proportion between the “pre-moral” or “physical” goods and evils which actually result from the action. This is pushed to the point where a concrete kind of behaviour, even one freely chosen, comes to be considered as a merely physical process, and not according to the criteria proper to a human act” (John Paul II 1993, 65).

Pope John Paul II correctly identifies the argument posed by the theorists of fundamental option. One may object, however, that this response *seems* to miss the point. He continues, “There is no doubt that Christian moral teaching, even in its biblical roots, acknowledges the specific importance of a *fundamental choice* (emphasis added) which qualifies the moral life and engages freedom on a radical level before God. It is a question of the decision of faith, of the *obedience of faith*” (John Paul II 1993, 66).

And from this he goes on to describe the call to discipleship, the *sequela Christi*. Later in that same section, citing Galatians 5 and the warning that sin leads to slavery, he equates the act of faith with “a fundamental option”. However, the decision to repent and believe is an act made in space and time, a categorial decision, of which one is “reflectively conscious”. When Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6), he decided for Christ. Later, before the cock crowed, he denied Jesus three times. Subsequently, he reaffirmed his (three times!) his love for Jesus. In every instance, Peter had performed a categorial act, “directly accessible to observation and verification.” Judas Iscariot responded positively to the Lord’s call to follow him, but then betrayed him. Both of these men performed acts of commitment and denial by specific acts in space and times. John Paul II would identify these acts as decisions of a fundamental option. It would seem, however, that Fuchs and McCormick would not. Has John Paul II misunderstood the point?

Indeed, the act of faith, expressed by affirming the Creed or some similar formula, is precisely a categorial and not a transcendental decision. And therefore, might one not maintain that even if a particular, categorial act should implicitly constitute a denial of that faith – for instance that under threat he consent to membership in the Communist Party¹ – that act need not, and very well might not, reach to the transcendental level and therefore not constitute a repudiation of the fundamental option for God?

Underlying the notion of human freedoms is the capacity for self-determination (Wojtyła 2013, 6). No human act occurs in a spiritual vacuum, but rather it is chosen within the context of one’s choice of his life, of his self. So, the prospective scientist devotes himself to a course of academic study, while his neighbor undertakes an apprenticeship to become a plumber. Their daily choices of activities are formed in part by their respective goals. Pope John Paul II situates precisely this principle of self-determination at the outset of his encyclical. Relating the story of the rich young man’s encounter with Christ (Matt. 19:16 ff), John Paul II remarks, “For the young man, the *question* is not

¹ This author knows directly of a case in which this choice was offered to *and accepted* by a professional who was close to Archbishop Karol Wojtyła.

so much about rules to be followed, but *about the full meaning of life*. This is in fact the aspiration at the heart of every human decision and action, the quiet searching and interior prompting which sets freedom in motion. This question is ultimately an appeal to the absolute Good which attracts us and beckons us; it is the echo of a call from God who is the origin and goal of man's life" (John Paul II 1993, 7).

The young man who approaches Jesus with the question of what good must be done to inherit eternal life is asking for a direction. How should he live? How should he form his actions? Just as the prospective athlete must devote himself to daily exercise and refrain from indulging in rich pastries, one who would respond to God's initiation – an invitation that Christ expressed in the words, "Follow me" – must behave in a way consonant with that response. Therefore, our hypothetical adulterous salesman or, more to the point, St Peter in the high priest's courtyard, having knowingly vowed fidelity to a wife or faith in Jesus, respectively, knows that he has done wrong. Both may deeply regret their behavior subsequently and seek to make amends. Or they may not; Judas went forth and hanged himself. The fact that one sins out of weakness or having been surprised and overwhelmed by events does not mean that he has lost his freedom. He knows what he is doing and does it anyway. The fact that he, like Peter, later repents manifests this.

Several crucial factors become clear as we reflect on the consequences of this contemporary conception of fundamental option. The first and surely most obvious (although this author has never seen it cited) is the presumption that the sinner is in the state of grace in the first place, that his freedom is fundamentally ordered to the transcendent Good. Because the fundamental option argument is generally framed in terms of a *turning* away from the good, this presumption arguably amounts to a denial of original sin.

Indeed, the framing of the theory makes it difficult anthropologically to locate this fundamental freedom. Freedom is the capacity to love what is good and reject what is evil, as good and evil are present to the appetites. The moral obligation is to seek and choose the good as presented to the rational appetite, or will. Freedom is particularly manifest in the power of free choice by which one cognitively weighs alternative goods in order to choose one of them. One can choose between eating either vegetables or steak, or between either accepting sexual frustration or using contraceptives. As St Thomas argues, every decision is ordered toward the good as such, according to the person's conception of that good. (Aquinas 1952, , Ia, q. 82, a. 2; Ia, IIae, q. 1, a. 7; q. 5, a. 8) However, no state of affairs or proposed action that one can envision adequately embodies the transcendent good that is to be the object of the fundamental choice.

If the transcendent good is to be found only in God, as fundamental option theorists agree, then it is impossible for human reason adequately to frame

the choice for or against God. This is because in this life God himself cannot be known directly by human intellect. St Thomas's treatment of the question is instructive. Under the conditions of this life, we cannot know God except in his effects. What natural reason can know of God is only that he is the First Cause, perfect in his being, identical with his essence and existence, eternal, and perfect in goodness. If God is known in his transcendence only as discerned by human thought, then he is hardly known at all. Any mental image of God as an object of choice is inadequate. In this respect, the theorists of fundamental option are correct. One can never know whether he has directed his entire being toward the perfect good.

Freedom lies at the heart of the mystery of man. On the one hand, the ordinary experience of freedom is perfectly clear. If I position my knight on the fifth rank, then I may open a file for the rook. So, I choose so to move the knight rather than the bishop. On the other hand, we may ask if the emotionally fragile war hero, Othello, having been manipulated by Iago, chose in complete freedom to murder Desdemona. We cannot affirm a direct causal line from thoughts, emotions, desires, and impulses to muscular acts. Saint Peter, boldly professed, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33). However, when surrounded by the enemies of Christ and fearing for himself, he denied Jesus three times. In the crucial moment as Jesus appeared before the High Priest, did Peter really love him or did he prove that he loved himself more? Freedom is a profound mystery that the theorists of fundamental option cannot resolve. Failing to account for the mystery, they cannot legitimately conclude that a specific categorical act (such as to say "I do not know the man") is not mortally sinful.

The Anthropological Problem

Here, then, is the first difficulty with fundamental option theory, the anthropological problem. If it is impossible to specify how one act can turn one away from the perfect good, how is it possible to affirm that one is ordered *toward* that good? Our faith affirms that because of original sin, each of us is or has been directed away from that good. If we are born in sin, then the problem arises of our conversion to the good. If the state of original sin is understood as a sort of neutral state between good and evil, then the same problem remains: how is one converted toward the good. If this is taken to be a natural human act, then there arises the problem of Pelagianism: one attains righteousness by his own choice and act.

Theological Considerations

The second and more serious difficulty with fundamental option theory is that it ignores the role of grace. In this life, the knowledge of God requires faith, which is a theological virtue. In a text that Pope John Paul II found to be especially important, the Second Vatican Council teaches: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear” (Vatican Council II 1965, 22).

The implications of this text, especially for the philosopher, are disconcerting, because it clearly implies that any philosophical or scientific understanding of man is inadequate. But the mystery of the Incarnate Word is accessible only by grace through Revelation. It is Christ who reveals us to ourselves and makes our destiny and vocation clear. In particular, the problem of sin, of human disobedience to God, is intractable to philosophy. Sin is not a philosophical category, and we mislead ourselves if we limit our considerations to those of philosophy. But fundamental option theory is philosophical.

In *Veritatis Splendor* Pope John Paul II affirms that this fundamental orientation toward or away from God can be and is determined by particular acts. (John Paul II 1993, 70) The fullest explanation of how this is so is found not in *Veritatis Splendor*, but in his earlier encyclical on the Holy Spirit, where sin and our ultimate knowledge of sin is necessarily linked to the cross of Christ. “Beginning from this initial witness at Pentecost and for all future time the action of the Spirit of truth who “convinces the world concerning the sin” of the rejection of Christ is linked inseparably with the witness to be borne to the Paschal Mystery: *the mystery of the Crucified and Risen One*. And in this link the same “convincing concerning sin” reveals its own salvific dimension” (John Paul II 1986, 31).

That sin – the sin of deicide – was the gravest sin conceivable: God had come into the world as man in Jesus Christ, “true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father” as the Creed states, and those to whom he came rejected him and had him killed. However, from the Gospel accounts of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus we can find plausible reasons to justify or at least excuse the actions of all the principal actors, from St Peter to Judas, from the High Priest to Pontius Pilate. In the case of any of these principals, might one not say that although he had sinned gravely, his sin was not mortal? Pope John Paul II’s argument is that Christ’s words that when the Holy Spirit comes, “he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment” (John 16: 8), mean that the world will be convinced of the sin of

crucifying Christ. Furthermore, “By convincing the «world» concerning the sin of Golgotha, concerning the death of the innocent Lamb, as happens on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit also convinces of every sin, committed in any place and at any moment in human history: for he demonstrates its relationship with the Cross of Christ. The «convincing» is the demonstration of the evil of sin, of every sin, in relation to the Cross of Christ” (John Paul II 1986, 32).

In this way, the depths of every human heart are revealed by the Holy Spirit, the Counsellor, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. A consequence of this is that the sinner’s lack of awareness of his own sin does not excuse him. Fear, training, and Pilate’s power might blind the scourging soldier to his evil, but the evil is not thereby excused.

Sin is a theological and not a philosophical category. Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* offers us an acute analysis of moral philosophy, accurately characterizing virtue and vice and providing a vision of the good life. What Aristotle does not provide is an account of the truly evil act. The closest he comes is in his discussion of virtue as the mean where he writes, “Nor does goodness or badness [...] depend on committing adultery with the right woman, at the right time, and in the right way, but simply to do any of them is to go wrong” (Aristotle 1988, Bk II, ch 6, 1007a).

Aristotle knows that adultery is wrong, but he does not regard it as something that thoroughly corrupts one’s relationship with the ultimate good. We see something similar in Plato, who regards sexual intimacy with boys as problematic but not as decisively corrupting (Plato 1961a, 401c-403c) (Plato 1961b, 181a-185b). Plato does acknowledge a kind of total corruption, which arises when a lower appetite rules over the rational part of the soul (Plato 1961a, 572e-577a). We notice, however, that Plato has no account of the will. Rather Plato proposes only that young people with the capacity for philosophical thought be trained in such a way that they not fall into degradation. As the allegory of the cave indicates, the fulfillment and perfection of the person consists in philosophical contemplation of the Form of the Good. It is a purely intellectual salvation.

Sin is a choice against God and as such is irrational. We try to ascribe reasons for wickedness. Of Hitler, W.H. Auden asked whether the evil of September 1, 1939, might be traced back to Alois Hitler’s poor parenting (Auden 1954, 583-586). As his poem shows, however, such accounts of the “psychopathic god” are inadequate. Ultimately, there is no reason that adequately explains sin. Nevertheless, sins do make a certain sense. There is a logic behind them, even if the roots of the evil decision are hidden in the heart of the person.

Because of his dignity and exalted nature, the person can sin. In *Person and Act*, Karol Wojtyła writes, “Man is not only the agent of his action but also its creator. The task of evoking the coming to existing and the existence of the

effect belongs to the essence of efficacy. However, the task of forming a work belongs to the essence of creativity” (Wojtyła 2021, 171).

As elephants bathe in streams on the African plains, they make ponds, but they do not create them. Creation is an intelligent act. The creator implements a plan that he has devised. God the Creator has created the world according to his own intelligent plan, which originated from himself. The human person is, as it were, a co-creator. Gifted with his own intelligence, he acts according to his understanding and for the sake of a vision that he intends to implement. Karol Wojtyła writes, “We are by nature creators, not just consumers. We are creators because we think. [...] Creating as derived from thinking is so characteristic of a person that it is always an infallible sign of a person, a proof of a person’s existence or presence” (Wojtyła 1993, 171).

Twenty years later, criticizing a materialistic approach to human work, Pope John Paul II wrote, “... man is treated as an instrument of production, whereas he – he alone, independently of the work he does – ought to be treated as the effective subject of work and its true maker and creator” (John Paul II 1981, 7).

The creative person – and every person acting by his intelligence is creative – is not only changing something in the external material world, but he is co-creating that world, imposing his own order upon a portion of the world and the human environment, deciding how the world shall be. This creative act can be in harmony with the eternal law that God the Creator has impressed on his world as a loving interpretation of the providential order. But the human mind can foster an order contrary to the divine by an act is contrary to the divine wisdom and its order of love. This is intrinsically evil.

Conclusion

The theory of the fundamental option as it has been presented in recent moral theology is untenable, based as it is on a questionable philosophical hypothesis of an unknowable transcendent freedom. Theologically, it appears to deny the reality of original sin and even to presuppose a form of Pelagianism. It effectively ignores the reality of sin. We may ask then where this leaves us who are faced with serious sin and its consequences.

The advocates of this theory maintain a tripartite distinction of sins as mortal, serious, and venial. A *serious* sin is a misdeed whose matter is grave; procuring an abortion is an example. However, it differs from a *mortal* sin in that the agent’s *fundamental freedom* is not engaged. One who has performed a *serious* sin should repent and try to avoid repeating this sin, but because his fundamental freedom is not engaged – because he has not revoked his funda-

mental option for God – he has not broken his loving relationship with God and thereby endangered his eternal salvation. Such a sinner need not fear eternal damnation because of serious sin, even if he would be well-advised to approach the sacrament of reconciliation to confess this sin.

This tripartite distinction badly misconceives the notion of sin. The central point is that some acts, such as willful murder, are in themselves evil. One who murders his neighbor has done an evil act. We may identify factors that lessen culpability in a particular case; consider, for example, the young woman who unexpectedly finds herself pregnant and lacking resources for living and whose husband or boyfriend – the father of the child – pressures her to get rid of the fetus he has begotten in her (John Paul II 1995, 18, 59). An immature woman in such straits may well see herself as without options and effectively ‘forced’ to get an abortion. Although her own culpability may be reduced, the truth remains that she has chosen or consented to have the infant in her womb killed. Regardless of her own subjectivity, her psychological condition, she has performed an act offensive to God and contrary to his will. And so it is with other such sins, sodomy, contraceptive use, oppression of the helpless, torture, and so on (Vatican Council II 1965, 27). Subjectively, one might feel that he has not turned away from God, that he means only to direct himself toward the authentic good, that he really ‘had no choice’. Understandable as such thoughts are, we must recognize that the human mind is and always has been notoriously blind to its own wickedness. No one is an unbiased witness in his own case, and much less is he an indifferent judge. It is God who has been offended by the sin, and only he “who knows what is in man”² can judge the heart. This is why Pope John Paul II insists repeatedly that the Holy Spirit is he who convicts us of sin. Commonly, it is only grace that pierces through the heart’s self-deception to convict it of sin (John Paul II 1986, 32).

The most important fact about mortal sin is that one who dies in the state of unrepented mortal sin is damned to eternal punishment in hell. That someone, a person like every other, should suffer this penalty is hard to comprehend. For each of us, this prospect that I might be found on the King’s left hand among the goats at the judgment (Matt. 25:41). Citing St Paul’s condemnation of certain sins, John Paul II refers to this possibility. Saint Paul declares that “the immoral, idolaters, adulterers, sexual perverts, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers” are excluded from the Kingdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 6:9). This condemnation – repeated by the “Council of Trent” – lists as “mortal sins” or “immoral practices” certain specific kinds of behaviour the wilful acceptance of which prevents believers from sharing in the inheritance promised to them (John Paul II 1993, 49).

² A favorite phrase of John Paul II’s.

“Excluded from the Kingdom of God”, such persons can only be consigned to the fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41). These sinners have lost “the inheritance promised to them”. Let us attend closely to the context of this discussion, to the parameters governing it. John Paul II does not speak of a legal system in which those who obey the rules will receive a reward, while those who break them will be punished. Reflecting Christ’s words from the final judgment scene, “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt 25:34), he speaks of God’s intended destiny for all human beings, a destiny indicated also by the Second Vatican Council: “The root reason for human dignity lies in man’s call to communion with God. From the very circumstance of his origin man is already invited to converse with God” (Vatican Council II 1965, 19). The focus of *Veritatis Splendor*, like that of *Gaudium et spes*, is on the immense mercy and generosity of God towards human beings. Indeed, the horrors of eternal damnation make sense only in relation to the glory of salvation.

To understand *Veritatis Splendor* aright we must read it in the light of its third chapter, which situates the question of morality within the context of the Lord’s Cross and the martyrdom of the saints. “It is in the Crucified Christ that the Church finds the answer to the question troubling so many people today: how can obedience to universal and unchanging moral norms respect the uniqueness and individuality of the person, and not represent a threat to his freedom and dignity? [...] The Crucified Christ reveals the authentic meaning of freedom; he lives it fully in the total gift of himself and calls his disciples to share in his freedom” (John Paul II 1993, 85).

Veritatis Splendor rejects a “dual morality” with a set of principles and commandments for the *ordinary* Christian and another for the *perfect*, as though some may be called to heroic virtue, while enough virtue suffices for most (John Paul II 1993, 18). Rather, all are called to the perfection of the *sequela Christi*. As noted above, in his encyclical on the Holy Spirit, the reality and nature of sin are revealed in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. That Good Friday was an ordinary day on which shepherds watched over their flocks in Roman Palestine, Chinese sailors shipped goods on the Yellow River, Roman soldiers patrolled the borders of the empire, and babies were born to Inca mothers in South America. It was an ordinary day, but Jesus was crucified, and with this Satan won his greatest victory. He had orchestrated the murder of the Lord of life. Evil had conquered good on Good Friday, and outside of Jerusalem no one noticed. Of course, his victory was short-lived. But he kept up his efforts to destroy the reign of God. Wherever the Gospel went, the reign of evil fought back. Of the apostles, only one was not a martyr. The mighty Roman empire could not abide the presence of Christians who refused the Caesars their due worship. King Henry VIII of England unleashed a brutal reign of

terror against his Catholic subjects, thereby creating a wave of martyrs. Vladimir Lenin promised that Christianity would disappear in the Soviet Union as he and his successor, Joseph Stalin, sent Christians to the camps and their deaths. From its first days the Gospel has faced an irrational and intractable resistance from evil, and Christians, bishops, clergy, and ordinary lay persons, have had to face the threats of torture and martyrdom.

Our human task is not to discern who must be the last person allowed into the lifeboat or which way to direct a trolley car. It is to take our place in the battle between intransigent evil and the unimaginable good of fellowship with God – even if we are weak. “But what are the «concrete possibilities of man?»». And of *which* man are we speaking? Of man *dominated* by lust or of man *redeemed* by Christ? This is what is at stake: the *reality* of Christ’s redemption. *Christ has redeemed us!* This means that he has given us the possibility of realizing *the entire* truth of our being; he has set our freedom free from the *domination* of concupiscence” (John Paul II 1993, 103).

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